

6 March 1967

Admiral Taylor

Rostow-requested Memorandum

I had lunch with Mr. Rostow on 20 February and he asked me to write up the comments I made orally during our lunch so he could have them on paper. The two attached pieces of paper represent my response to his request. They were sent with the Director's approval.

From subsequent telephone conversations I infer that Rostow talked with the President and with Komer about the ideas I advanced. (Komer phoned to say that he wanted a copy of "my report" and had arranged with Rostow to handle the matters considered therein.) With the Director's approval I have sent Komer a copy of the 2 March memorandum. However, I did not send him a copy of the "Dear Walt" letter. This went only to Rostow.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachments

3 March 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Robert W. Komer
Special Assistant to the President

SUBJECT : Vietnam Observations

Attached is a copy of my "report," which is actually a set of informal comments written up at Walt Rostow's request and covering the points he and I discussed at our 20 February lunch. As you will recognize, these are personal observations with which my Agency colleagues would not necessarily agree; they are incorporated in a personal memorandum which is not a formal Agency product.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

3 Mar 67

The Director

Rostow-requested memorandum

At your suggestion, I took the penultimate paragraph and its immediate predecessor out of my memorandum and conveyed the points covered therein to Rostow (only) via a personal letter. A copy of the letter is attached herewith for your information.

George A. Carver, Jr.

Attachment

VIETNAM AFFAIRS STAFF
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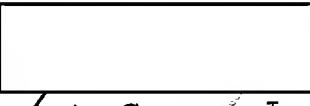
DATE: 2 March 1967

TO: The Director
FROM: George A. Carver, Jr.
SUBJECT: Rostow-requested Memorandum

REMARKS:

After our long, lunch-time conversation on 20 February, Rostow asked me to write up in detail the points I had made and pass them informally to him. The attached document represents my attempt to comply with his request. If you approve, I will send it over.

Since the request was levied, Rostow has apparently talked with the President and with Komer about my views. Komer has called to request a copy of "my report." I am willing to send it to him but, again, not without your approval.

STAT

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

Approved For Release 2004/06/14 : CIA-RDP80R01720R00000112-3

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2 March 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Walt W. Rostow
Special Assistant to the President
SUBJECT : Vietnam Observations

1. Per your request, I have written a summary of my views on the points covered during our luncheon conversation on Monday, 20 February. A copy of this written resume is attached herewith.

2. The attached paper is an informal document written for you alone. It is not and should not be read as a formal Agency product. The views expressed therein reflect my own personal observations and should not be read as conveying an Agency position.

George A. Carver Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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2 March 1967

Dear Walt:

In my summary comments I did not include two points which we discussed because they both involve particularly delicate and sensitive issues. One gets into a policy area which is outside the bounds of my professional responsibilities as an intelligence officer, the other relates to remarks made privately to me by General Westmoreland.

I do not know how many people are going to read my comments or what use they will make of them. (Komer, for example, has asked for a copy of "my report," which I shall send him, and others such as Bill Bundy may well levy similar requests.) I do not want my remarks on the two points in question to be spread around or used out of context in a way that could cause embarrassment or injury to the Agency or to General Westmoreland. Consequently, I am putting these observations only in this private letter to you:

First, I noted in my 2 March memorandum that presently favorable trends in Vietnam are fragile and could easily be reversed by any of a number of possible developments. In the memorandum I cited a dissolution of the Vietnamese military establishment's present cohesion and unity as one example. As I mentioned in our conversation, presently favorable trends would also be swiftly reversed if pressure were taken off the Communists by our adoption of a negotiation scenario which included some form of in-place cease fire in South Vietnam as part of the script. If the U.S. were to move in this direction -- or if the South Vietnamese should come to think we were going to move in this direction -- much that we have patiently stitched together at great cost would quickly unravel. It would be hard to overstate the apprehension felt in Saigon over the risk of such a development. When February 12 came and went without a resumption of the bombing palpable concern swept through Saigon like an electric shock.

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Secondly as I also indicated during our conversation, grave concern and apprehension over the dangers of a negotiation scenario which would take the pressure off the Communists is not confined to the Vietnamese. It is very much evident in American official circles. General Westmoreland, for example, is a fine, loyal, capable and imaginative soldier, responsible in every way and possessed of an incisive grasp of the international political considerations which affect our conduct of the war in Vietnam. He always has and always will faithfully execute any orders he receives from his duly constituted superiors. He has a frank and realistic appreciation of the problems we face in Vietnam, but he also recognizes what we have achieved and what we and the Vietnamese can achieve if we persist in the execution of the programs we now have in train. When the two of us talked on 13 February, he was a very worried man. He showed me a letter he personally signs and sends to the next of kin of every serviceman killed in action in his command -- a splendid, dignified letter as straightforward and honest as its author. The letter concludes with a short paragraph in which General Westmoreland personally assures the dead American's next of kin that their son's -- or husband's or brother's or father's -- sacrifice has not been in vain, that his comrades and fellow citizens will persist until they achieve a final victory which will vindicate that death. On 13 February General Westmoreland was wondering whether he ought to continue to sign that letter.

I have made the comments above because they deal with important matters of which you should be aware, and because I trust your judgment and discretion in ensuring that these remarks will not be taken out of context or otherwise misused.

George A. Carver, Jr.

Attachment

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2 MAY 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Comments on Vietnam

I. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

I spent two weeks in South Vietnam (1 through 15 February), visited all four corps areas and thirteen of the country's forty-four provinces. I had two long, good sessions with Ambassador Lodge and with General Westmoreland; spent a good deal of time with the outgoing Political Counselor, Mr. Habib, and his replacement, Mr. Calhoun; talked with two of the four OCO Regional Directors, two U.S. Division commanders, a number of U.S. military personnel (ranging in rank from general officer to private soldier) and a wide variety of U.S. civilian officials. On the Vietnamese side, I talked to a number of old friends both in and out of the government, saw several province chiefs, ARVN commanders, and had good sessions with General Thang, General Loan, and Ky's Secretary of State and principal civilian advisor, Dinh Trinh Chinh. My pattern of contacts was not systematic and probably did not produce a statistically valid opinion model; but my contacts and observations were sufficiently wide-ranging to provide the basis for some general impressions that I think are essentially accurate.

My personal bench marks for judging what I saw were the observations made during my last visit in April and May of 1965. The contrasts between the situation existing then and that existing today were dramatic and striking. There are many soft spots and weak areas in the present situation but the overall progress made in the last twenty-odd months is inescapable and overwhelming. In the spring of 1965 one could smell defeat in the air: the ARVN was being whipsawed, Saigon governments were toppling, there was a palpable feeling of desperation throughout South Vietnam, and a Communist victory seemed only a matter of time. All this has changed -- largely as a result of the massive infusion of U.S. troops which began in the early summer of 1965. It would be too much to say that our side scents victory, but there is certainly no atmosphere of defeat or impending disaster. Morale on the Vietnamese and U.S. side is infinitely better. The RVN is functioning and,

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by Vietnamese standards, stable. The Communists have suffered defeats on the battlefield and are losing the support of the rural population. The GVN's positive programs are beginning to show the first signs of forward momentum. The improvement noticeable over the past twenty months can be seen not only in the general atmosphere but also in little details: the mood of people both in and out of official life, the things one can now do, the places one can now go. For example, I was able to drive twenty-five kilometers north of Qui Nhon on Route 1 and then go five more kilometers east of the main road to look at a Revolutionary Development team working in a hamlet. In the spring of 1965 no RD team could have been located in that area and no American official could have travelled that road. In itself this incident is trivial, but it is symptomatic of some very profound changes in the total situation.

II. THE FOUR STRUGGLES

My overall impression, thus, is one of progress and achievement; but it would obviously be wrong to suggest that everything is going well in all areas or that success in any is imminent. In Vietnam today you have not one but, basically, four struggles, each of which must be analyzed separately before one can draw valid composite conclusions about the total situation.

A. The Struggle Against the Communists' Quasi-Conventional Military Forces. This struggle against Communist military forces, ranging from Viet Cong Provincial Mobile Battalions through organic elements of the North Vietnamese Army, attracts most of the headlines and engages the bulk of international public attention devoted to South Vietnamese affairs. On the whole, this struggle is going very well -- primarily because of the presence and efforts of U.S. forces. During the past year, the Communists have lost their former monopoly of the military initiative and the aura of military invincibility which used to be one of their most potent political assets. By and large, the Communists now seek to avoid engagement with large Free World, particularly U.S., units. When engagements do occur they are usually the result of allied rather than Communist initiative. Furthermore, when they occur, they almost invariably result in Communist tactical defeat. Communist forces are suffering heavy and increasing casualties. Their base areas are no longer sacrosanct and, instead, are increasingly subjected to interdiction and physical penetration. The prospect of major success, if not victory itself, which must have heartened the Communists in the spring of

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1965 no longer exists. Instead, the best the Communists can now hope for militarily is a prolonged harassing action which will spin out the struggle long enough to wear down their adversaries' will and give political pressures favorable to the Communist cause time to mount.

In the conventional military struggle, the past year has unquestionably been a good one for the South Vietnamese and their Free World allies. This does not mean, however, that the Communists are on the brink of defeat or we on the brink of a military victory which will solve our problems. As General Westmoreland took great pains to point out, cogently and persuasively, the fact that this has been a good year militarily and the pride all Americans can legitimately take in the fine performance of our troops should not lead us into excessive optimism or blind us to the fact that the enemy's military force is still large, strong, basically intact and very much of a threat. General Westmoreland believes the Communists are building toward and can probably attain a twelve division force structure which, if they achieve it, will stretch us very thin indeed. He is very concerned about the constant threat posed by the two North Vietnamese divisions now poised in Cambodia in a politically sacrosanct sanctuary from which they can sally forth at any time. He is also concerned about the situation in I Corps, where he feels the Communists have the capability for exerting pressures our forces in I Corps will find it difficult to cope with unless augmented by forces that can be ill spared from current operations in II and III Corps.

During the past year, in short, Communist conventional military forces have been checked and hurt, but not defeated. Although the net results of this struggle are very much on the plus side of our ledger, the struggle itself is far from over.

B. The Struggle Against the Communists' Indigenous Military and Political Organization. Success against the Communists' quasi-conventional military forces is a necessary but far from sufficient condition for a GVN and allied victory. Over the long run, the struggle against the indigenous political and military (i. e. terrorist) organization the Communists have built up within South Vietnam is even more important than the struggle against the Communists' conventional military units. Even if all North Vietnamese troops and North Vietnamese logistic support were withdrawn from South Vietnam, the Lao Dong (Vietnamese Communist) Party-controlled indigenous southera organization which now exists (the organization which

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started the insurgency and through which it was exclusively waged until 1964) -- would remain a cancer within the Vietnamese body politic capable of causing South Vietnam's collapse as a free nation. This organization constitutes the Communists' greatest source of strength in South Vietnam and at the same time, paradoxically, their area of greatest vulnerability.

The Communists are vulnerable because it is their organization alone which holds the insurgent movement together and keeps it going. The Communists do not now have any widespread or deep-rooted emotions working for them as they did in Viet Minh days, when they were able to ride and capitalize on a pervasive surge of nationalism and opposition to continued French rule. (The Communists have never been able to make real mileage with their line that the Americans are successor-imperialists to the French.) Nor do the Communists now have any mass base of genuine popular support. They did have such a base in earlier years (1954-1963), but in recent years it has been eroding steadily rather than growing. What the Communists do have is a superb, efficient and usually locally-rooted organization carefully built up over many years (in some areas, over more than two decades). This organization's continued effectiveness, however, is a direct function of the competence, dedication and continued activity of a relative handful of key people (probably less than 10,000 country-wide).*

The past year has not seen dramatic progress in our generally unpublicized struggle against the Communists' southern organization, but there has been solid achievement in this sphere. We have not won many victories yet, but we have made very significant progress in preparing the battlefield. What we have improved -- impressively and in many cases dramatically -- is our intelligence. We now know far more than we ever did before who the key figures in the Communist organization are -- the members of village, district and even provincial Communist committees, what names they use, what they look like, where their close relatives live, where they themselves are located or, even more important, are going to be located physically at some known future time.

* In the Mekong Delta, for example, the Communists are hurting because they themselves stripped their better Delta political and military cadres during 1965 in order to achieve a rapid expansion of their forces in III Corps and II Corps.

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This quantum improvement in police-type intelligence is much more apparent in the field than in Washington (or even in Saigon). It is the result of many factors: shaken popular confidence in a Communist victory which makes peasants more willing to talk, improved U.S.-aided Vietnamese police work, the Census Grievance activities of RD cadre teams (among the most important single factors), better collation and exploitation of information already available, etc. We still have a long way to go in filling in the names on the Communists' organization charts, but we have come a long way indeed in the past months. Progress is more marked in some localities than others, of course, but progress is being made country-wide.

Learning who and where the key figures in the Communist organization are is only the first step in the struggle. The next step, obviously, is doing something with the information. Here progress is just beginning and is very spotty, but it is being made -- particularly in areas where proper and selective use is being made of small teams known as Provincial Reconnaissance Units, whose primary mission is that of taking executive action against identified elements of the Communists' organizational structure.

The struggle against the Communists' indigenous organization has not progressed as successfully or dramatically as the struggle against the Communists' conventional military forces, but it is progressing -- and in a manner which suggests that the rate of progress should steadily improve. We have a long, long way to go in this critical area, but we and our Vietnamese allies are beginning to move forward.

C. The Struggle to Create National Institutions. Many of our problems in Vietnam are rooted in the fact that South Vietnam is not and never has been a nation in our Western sense of that term. Its politics have no institutional cement, no accepted institutional symbols on which national pride or feeling can focus or which can themselves evoke such nationalist sentiments, no accepted hierarchy of institutional forums within which political differences can be settled without recourse to violence, street demonstrations, or tanks. A central element in the U.S.-supported effort of non-Communist Vietnamese to create an independent South Vietnamese nation is the struggle to create the national institutions necessary if such a nation is to be built.

The record of the past twenty-odd months in this field is most encouraging. It is easy to spot and catalogue the stresses, weak spots and areas of potentially disastrous conflict in the Vietnamese body politic.

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Nevertheless, the fact remains that the present government has remained in office since May 1965 and has coped successfully with crises and pressures similar in kind to those which toppled several of its predecessors. This government, furthermore, responded to voiced popular aspirations for a broader-based regime by conducting a nation-wide election in which more than half the adult population participated.* This election produced a Constituent Assembly which has now nearly completed its work of drafting a constitution. The odds are at least considerably better than even that the constitution will be promulgated, new elections held under its provisions, and a new government put in office by this process, a government which will have a valid claim to a legal mandate for its rule. The mandate may be far from perfect in terms of abstract liberal political theory, but it will be the best thing available in present-day Vietnam and will constitute a far clearer title to political authority than anything possessed by the Communists or their front mechanism, the NLF.

The precise institutional shape of the future government and the identities of the individuals who will play predominant roles therein are still obscure, partly because the Constituent Assembly has not yet completed the constitution it is drafting but primarily because the military establishment** has not yet decided how to play its political hand. The military establishment feels strongly (and accurately) that it must remain united if the situation is to be saved; that chaos will result if it splits into hostile factions. The military leaders are firmly convinced that under present circumstances South Vietnam must have a strong, authoritarian government with authority largely vested in a single, paramount executive officer, i.e., a de Gaulle-type presidency. (In essence, this is also the tenor of the constitution the Assembly is now drafting.) The problem, which the military establishment recognizes but has not yet faced up to, is that under such a structure there can only be one de Gaulle. In terms of the military's current thinking, this means Ky or Thieu -- i.e., a choice which, because it involves a winner and a loser, will inevitably strain the very unity the military establishment considers it essential to preserve.

* 4.2 million people participated in the September election. This is usually described as more than 80% of the eligible electorate. I consider it more significant that this is over half the estimated adult population (18 and over) of South Vietnam, including all the Viet Cong and their supporters. (Our best estimate is that South Vietnam's adult population numbers about 7.7 million.)

** As used in this paper, "the military establishment" means Marshal Ky, General Thieu and their immediate colleagues and advisors.

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At the present time, ultimate political authority in Vietnam rests with a collegium of generals, a collegium which has not one but two principal executive officers and agents: Ky and Thieu. Under present arrangements, Ky and Thieu both support each other and need each other. Furthermore -- and this is central -- neither is really subordinate to the other. They work well in tandem, but for a variety of reasons (face, pride, temperament, etc.) it is unlikely that either could, or would, function effectively as the other's subordinate.* Thus the military finds itself in a box from which it has not yet found an acceptable exit.

Ky and Thieu (along with their respective supporters) are both presently engaged in improving their political images taking political soundings and weighing alternative courses of action. Neither has yet decided what he himself is going to do; nor has the military establishment, collectively, decided which of the two it is going to back.

In talking with General Loan and Dinh Trinh Chinh I floated the idea that one way out of the military establishment's dilemma might be that of picking some elderly, respected southern civilian to back as a candidate for President (Tran Van Do, for example, or Phan Khac Suu or possibly Tran Van Huong). Such a civilian could serve as a focus and symbol of national unity, but if the military picked wisely -- i. e., selected someone who would be inclined to engross himself in the formal duties and representational aspects of the office and would not have the energy to address himself to continuing executive responsibilities -- they might be able to work out a deal whereby the civilian President would vest paramount executive authority in his Prime Minister (e. g. Ky) and draw heavily on the advice of the commander of his armed forces (e. g. Thieu, perhaps with an extra star). Some variant of this concept -- provided the civilian President did not throw his executive weight around too often and provided the Prime Minister and armed forces commander worked in tandem -- would improve the government's domestic and international image, reflect the political realities of present-day Vietnam, and eliminate the need for a Ky or Thieu choice. Both Loan and Chinh felt this idea was theoretically attractive but probably impractical since it required that Ky and Thieu both be satisfied with the substance rather than the form or trappings of paramount power. Both also felt, however, that if the military was to find its way out of the Ky or Thieu impasse, they would have

* General Loan and Dinh Trinh Chinh, two of Ky's closest advisors, both assured me (independently) that Ky could not work under Thieu. If Thieu became President, Ky could not serve as Prime Minister. He would not kick over the traces (they said), but would have to return to the Air Force or retire to private life. I did not talk with Thieu or any of his immediate entourage, but I believe he almost certainly feels the same way about Ky.

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to devise some compromise alternative which would avoid creating an obvious winner and an equally obvious loser.

Though the Vietnamese themselves do not know (and, hence, we cannot confidently predict) just how they will sort themselves out or just what institutional arrangements they are going to make, the odds for their arriving at some form of generally acceptable compromise seem to me to be considerably better than even. Political dialogue and peaceful balance-striking is a relatively new experience for our Vietnamese allies, but despite their shortcomings and mistakes, the overall progress they are making in this sphere is impressive.

Politically conscious Vietnamese, military and civilian, recognize and generally accept the fact that the military establishment now has effective control over most of the levers of real political power and is not disposed to surrender this control, though it is prepared to make adjustments and concessions and does want to obtain some popular or consensus mandate for its continued exercise of authority. If the military establishment remains united, whomever it decides to back in the forthcoming presidential elections will almost certainly win -- not because the elections will necessarily be rigged but because no civilian group can rival or counter the kind of nationwide organization that can be put together within the framework of the military establishment.* This fact of Vietnamese political life is, perhaps, insufficiently appreciated outside of Vietnam.

What is insufficiently appreciated within Vietnam, at least by the military, is the international (if not domestic) image need for the government and institutional structure that emerges from the present political process to have a strong civilian cast. If the new government is to work it must be structured in conformity with the realities of political power in South Vietnam, but if it is to be internationally accepted, it must look like something new -- or at least it must not look as if the whole political process now in train has done nothing but sprinkle a little constitutional and electoral holy water on present political arrangements. It is in this sphere of international political realities and image requirements that our Vietnamese allies could most benefit from some discreet advice and counsel.

* I got the strong impression from our conversation that General Loan is already building just such an organization, even though the decision on whom it will back has not yet been made.

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On balance, despite the fact that neither the new constitution nor this first set of national elections are likely to break the military establishment's monopoly of real political power, the effort to create new national institutions is proceeding in a promising fashion. Much more has been achieved to date than could have been realistically estimated twenty months ago, and -- if the military establishment remains united -- the remainder of this year should produce undeniable and internationally impressive further progress.

D. The Struggle to Engage the Population. The central problem involved in what is variously termed as pacification, revolutionary development or "the other war" is that of inducing the people of South Vietnam, particularly the peasantry, to engage themselves in and identify their fortunes with the central government in Saigon and those local authorities who act in its name. Over the long term, this is the most crucial struggle of all; its eventual outcome will determine the ultimate success or failure of the GVN's -- and our -- efforts in Vietnam.

Progress is harder to measure reliably in this area than any other. My overall impression was that we and our Vietnamese allies are not losing ground, but that achievement is less marked here than in the other three key struggles and that such progress as is being made is spotty or concentrated in local areas to such an extent that nation-wide generalizations are inherently misleading.

In terms of concept and organization, the GVN has come a long way in the past year. General Thang was an excellent choice to direct the government's pacification effort. He has qualities of dynamism, realism and apparent executive ability which set him in a class apart from most of his ARVN colleagues. In our conversation he took great pains to stress that 1967 would be a year of effort, trial and error during which few dramatic achievements could be anticipated but during which the foundations would be laid for real, lasting progress that should become increasingly manifest during 1968 and 1969. "We will make mistakes," he said, "we will fall on our face many times; but each time we do, we will have to get up and push forward." Such language may not sound spectacular, but it embodies a degree of candor and realism seldom found in or voiced by Vietnamese officials. The very fact that Thang is willing to approach his task in this vein is in itself grounds for encouragement.

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One problem facing Thang and the whole RD program is the fact that if this program is successful it will be, quite literally, revolutionary. If it works, it will change the basic structure of Vietnamese social and political life by giving a political voice -- and hence political power -- to segments of society, particularly rural society, who now have no voice, and hence no inducement to identify their fortunes with present political arrangements. These fundamental changes, however, are bound to be resisted by those segments of society which benefit most from the status quo. Thus, as (or if) Thang and his program begin to score real gains, both will generate hostility in presently powerful quarters. This will produce stress and at least some measure of discord which we must anticipate. Furthermore, no matter how pure Thang's motives may be, the fact remains that in the RD cadre he has at his command at least the nucleus of a nation-wide political machine responsive to his direction and control. This situation is bound to stimulate jealousy, suspicion, and (in at least some cases) enmity among his Vietnamese colleagues and superiors. Thang, in short, has a formidable job. He brings to it an impressive array of personal talents and he is tackling it in what seems to me very much the right way. To succeed, however, he will need not only skill, imagination, finesse and good management but also a certain measure of luck, the continued backing of his Vietnamese associates, and the right kind of support from his U. S. advisors.

There is a close, chicken-egg relationship between revolutionary development progress in a given local area and local security in that area, particularly security in terms of continuing protection for local residents from the local Viet Cong military and/or terrorist element in that area. This is something the Vietnamese Government must provide its own citizens or (even better) help them provide for themselves. Outside allied (i. e., U. S.) military units can be employed to cope with outside Communist units (i. e., VC Main Force or North Vietnamese Army elements) who come into a given area to back up or support the Communist locals, but the establishment and maintenance of local law and order must be a Vietnamese responsibility discharged primarily by Vietnamese. Throughout Vietnam, the critical factors here will be the local performance of and local attitudes toward the GVN's security forces: police, Popular Forces, Regional Forces and ARVN.

Wherever a visitor goes in Vietnam, briefing officers assure him that some respectable percentage of ARVN (and other Vietnamese) forces in that area are "committed to the support of revolutionary development." In some cases this phrase is genuinely descriptive; in many others, it is eyewash or

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the expression of a pious but far from realized hope. In some parts of IV Corps (particularly the 7th Division area around My Tho), local ARVN units really are being effectively used in real support of revolutionary development -- screening, patrolling and working in fair harmony with the Regional Forces, Popular Forces, police and RD cadre. In many parts of III Corps, however, local ARVN commanders patently feel that grubbing and patrolling around villages is beneath the dignity of professional soldiers. Throughout Vietnam there is a wide variation in the attitudes and enthusiasm for pacification of ARVN unit commanders and, consequently, in the pacification-support performance of ARVN units. There has almost certainly been some net improvement on this score in recent months, but ARVN elements in the field are far from being totally or effectively engaged in support of revolutionary development.

There is a similar variation in the attitudes of local officials (i.e., province and district chiefs) toward revolutionary development and its implementing instruments (e.g., the cadre program). In some areas the situation is good or at least encouraging (Phu Yen, Binh Dinh, and the Tieu Can district of Vinh Binh province are notable bright spots). In others, the attitudes and performance of local officials are much less encouraging. In some cases this is because provincial and district officials do not really understand what RD is all about; in others, it is because these local officials understand all too well, because they recognize that if the local peasantry are given a real political voice, the status quo from which these officials benefit is going to be radically changed. As with the pacification performance of ARVN, there seems to have been some net improvement in the attitude and performance of local officials over the past months but, as General Thang himself makes very clear, much still needs to be done in this critical sphere.

The principal instrument of the GVN's pacification/revolutionary development effort is the RD cadre program, with its fifty-nine man action teams, which include civic action and (most importantly) census-grievance components. The concept behind the program is sound; its worth and effectiveness have been proven repeatedly in areas where this concept has been properly and carefully applied (e.g., Binh Dinh and Phu Yen). The drastic expansion of the program over the past year, however, has exacted an inevitable cost in terms of quality. Furthermore, the passage of control over the program to the GVN -- a politically necessary step that would have had to be taken sometime -- has had unfortunate short-term results in some

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areas by reducing American leverage and authority which heretofore helped ensure that the program worked, despite a lack of understanding or actual obstruction on the part of some local Vietnamese officials.

The effectiveness of the RD cadre and the degree to which they are being properly positioned or utilized varies widely from province to province, and sometimes from district to district within the same province. The quality of the personnel chosen for training and subsequent utilization in the program also varies. It seems to be improving slowly (at least the current Vung Tau class is regarded as being better than its predecessor); but nationwide, the proportion of city boys selected is too high and the proportion of real peasants too low. (The better province chiefs are keenly aware of this imbalance and are trying to correct it.) The training being given at Vung Tau is generally well planned and well executed, though the weakest area at the present time is the political and motivational training which is probably the most important. In sum, the cadre program has many soft spots and shortcomings which need to be corrected and its overall performance record is spotty; but despite these deficiencies (which General Thang recognizes, explains better than I, and is working hard to correct) the cadre program has long since demonstrated its worth and holds great promise -- promise which is already being realized in some key areas throughout the country.

Considerable improvement has been made in recent months in U.S. support of the GVN's pacification/RD effort, particularly in the organizational sphere. The OCO structure is already helping to rationalize that support and improve both its efficiency and its effectiveness. OCO is still having labor pains and the details of its operations and responsibilities vis-a-vis other agencies are still being ironed out, but it is already obvious that OCO's establishment was a big step in the right direction. It is also obvious (and encouraging) that OCO's regional and provincial echelons are moving fairly briskly without waiting for OCO's Saigon headquarters to dot all the bureaucratic "i's". This will inevitably produce some confusion and administrative anguish, but it is a healthy sign.

So far this summary survey of the GVN's struggle to engage the population has considered only what the GVN is trying to do (with our help) and the shortfalls or soft spots in its efforts. Any such survey would be incomplete, however, without some mention of the Communists' current problems. I cannot quantify my views or prove them beyond reasonable

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doubt with hard evidence, but I came away from Vietnam with the strong impression that the Communists hold over the Vietnamese rural population is slipping, and in some areas beginning to slip very rapidly. Many things contribute to this: the shattering of the Communists' aura of military invincibility and the rise in doubts about the inevitability of Communist victory, the Communists' increasing inability to protect or keep the allies out of areas long under their control, their inability to prevent destruction occasioned by their presence from being visited upon areas in which they operate, their inability to deliver on the promises they made in earlier years in areas over which they established their authority, the increasingly onerous taxes they are levying on the rural population, their ever more frequent resort to impressment to gain recruits and the fact that they keep impressing youths at a progressively younger age (now 14 in many areas). Disenchantment or disaffection with the Communists does not necessarily or immediately translate into affection for or engagement with the GVN, but it does provide the GVN with a wider range of political opportunities than has ever existed before. The refugee flow is one indication of this. An even more significant indicator is the fact that at least in some delta provinces (Bac Lieu, Ba Xuyen, Dinh Tuong and Kien Phong) villages and hamlets long under Communist control are getting in touch with local GVN authorities and asking the GVN to come take them over. If this fissure ever becomes a crack, Communist control over the rural population will really begin to crumble.

On balance, the GVN's struggle to engage the population in its cause is certainly proceeding more slowly than any of the other three critical struggles, but it is moving forward. Despite the soft spots and shortfalls in South Vietnamese (and, sometimes, U.S.) performance and the many obstacles that have to be overcome, if you strike a balance which encompasses Communist problems as well as those faced by the GVN you come out, I think, with a net plus on the favorable side of our ledger.

III. CONCLUSIONS

My total net impression of the situation in South Vietnam was one of progress, achievement and promise. Progress is patently more marked in some areas than in others. It is most evident in the conventional military struggle, perhaps less obvious (yet) but still, I think, real in the struggle to build national institutions. The struggle against the indigenous Communist organization probably comes third in the net achievement scale (though I do

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think the ground here is being laid for what could develop into a real breakthrough). The struggle to engage the population certainly comes fourth in terms of present achievement, but this is obviously the most complex and difficult struggle of the four and the one in which dramatic, tangible progress is bound to be slow in coming. Even in the engagement struggle, furthermore, some real progress is already being made.

One should not ignore or minimize the problems which still exist, the things which still need to be accomplished (nighttime security, for example, is still virtually non-existent even on the outskirts of Saigon), or the many weaknesses and present performance shortfalls even in critical spheres. Nevertheless, granting all of this, in every key struggle area the net result of the past year has, I think, been favorable for our side and adverse for the Communists.

It would be inaccurate to say that one gets the impression of great forward momentum in South Vietnam, but the overall trends in every major area of struggle are favorable to our Vietnamese allies' major objectives and, hence, to ours. If these trends continue momentum will develop.

These presently favorable trends are fragile and could easily be reversed by any of a number of possible developments. A dissolution of the Vietnamese military establishment's present cohesion and unity, for example, would check, if not eradicate progress in the struggle to build national institutions and the struggle to engage the population. The damage would be particularly severe if key military figures started squabbling among themselves or resorted to force to further their political ideas and personal political ambitions.

In sum, despite all the grave problems in Vietnam and bad aspects of the present situation, when one compares the situation today with that which existed a year ago -- and particularly with that which existed two years ago -- it is manifest that a great deal has been and is being achieved (primarily as a consequence of the American commitment). Spectacular or dramatically obvious progress is not likely in the near term future; but the trends in every key area are now in our favor. Our present programs and those of our Vietnamese allies are basically sound. If we persist in these programs in a manner which continues and improves these presently favorable

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trends, there is a considerably better than even chance that within a reasonable time frame -- say eighteen months -- the total situation in Vietnam will have improved (by gradual increments) to the point where all but the willfully obtuse will be able to recognize that the Communist insurgency is failing, that the South Vietnamese are well on the way toward building an independent nation, that the U. S. Government's basic assessment of the situation in Vietnam was correct, and that, with U. S. support free men in underdeveloped areas can successfully cope with Communist wars of national liberation.